

Iain McDaniel

Paper: *Adam Ferguson and the Idea of Modern Monarchy*
5th November 2007

Iain McDaniel holds an MA in Intellectual History from the University of Sussex and a PhD from the University of Cambridge. He is currently a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow based in the Faculty of History at Cambridge. He also holds a Bye-Fellowship in History at Queens' College, Cambridge.

Iain works on the history of political thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He is particularly interested in reconstructing the intellectual history of modern critiques of military government, and his research examines, broadly, conceptions of the relationship between civil government and military powers and responsibilities in European political discourse from c. 1750 to c. 1900. He is currently working on two book-length projects which deal with these subjects from different historical and theoretical perspectives. The first extends his doctoral dissertation, which analysed the political theory of the Scottish philosopher and historian Adam Ferguson, with a particular focus upon Ferguson's little-studied *History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* (1783) and its connection to European political and historiographical debates of the eighteenth century. The forthcoming book will provide a complete reinterpretation of Ferguson's political thought and its place in Enlightenment debates about the relationship between civil societies and their armies. Iain's second major research project is a British Academy-funded study of the concept of Caesarism as it developed in the political and intellectual controversies of the nineteenth century. This project aims to revise contemporary understandings of the clash between democratic and imperial legacies in the intellectual history of the modern state after 1789.

One of Iain's essays on Ferguson's concept of military government and its connection to eighteenth-century histories of the ancient Roman republic will appear in November 2007 in a two-volume collection published by Pickering and Chatto. A second study looking in detail at the relationship between Ferguson's description of human nature, his moral psychology, and his theory of patriotic motivation will be published in 2008 in a special issue of *Acta Philosophica Fennica*.

Paper Abstract

Ferguson's political thought is conventionally described as a late Enlightenment attempt to deploy classical republican idioms as part of a critique of the justifications of commercial society set out by his Scottish contemporaries, notably David Hume and Adam Smith. Iain's paper takes a different route into Ferguson's thinking on the problems of modernity. It examines his attempt to develop a theory of civil government and liberty that would serve as a viable basis for reform of the late eighteenth-century British mixed monarchy. Ferguson's work was an attempt to repair a hiatus in Montesquieu's account of the foundations and future of modern liberty in Europe and England. In the *Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu raised a key question about the relationship between civil and military powers and magistracies in republics and monarchies. In response to this question, Ferguson proposed an alternative model of the relationship between military service and political authority in a modern 'civil society.' The paper develops this claim by setting Ferguson's accounts of aristocratic patriotism and modern monarchy against a range of European analyses of the tensions and compatibilities between liberty and different forms of social and political inequality within modern European monarchies. It thus aims both to revise and to clarify conventional scholarly understandings of Ferguson's place within the trajectories of Scottish, British and European discourses on republican and monarchical government in the eighteenth century.

Bibliography

The standard modern edition of Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* is in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought series: Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge, CUP, 1995). Useful materials on Ferguson's life and a collection of his later writings (including his important essay on the French Revolution and Bonaparte) can be found in two sets of volumes edited by Vincenzo Merolle and others; namely, Adam Ferguson, *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson*, ed. V. Merolle, with an introduction by Jane B. Fagg, 2 vols. (London, Pickering and Chatto, 1995), and Adam Ferguson, *The Manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, ed. V. Merolle, with R. Dix & E. Heath (London, Pickering and Chatto, 2005). There is, as yet, no modern edition of Ferguson's *History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*. For the broader intellectual context of some of the issues discussed in this paper, especially the crucial relationship between Montesquieu's political thought and that of his British and European readers, an excellent starting point is now Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007), particularly the book's opening chapter, "Facing the Future." Below is a short selection of recent books and articles on Ferguson:

Christopher Finlay, "Rhetoric and Citizenship in Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*", *History of Political Thought*, 27:1 (2006), 27-49

Marco Geuna, "Republicanism and Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Case of Adam Ferguson", in Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage. Volume II* (Cambridge, CUP, 2002), 177-196.

Lisa Hill, *The Passionate Society: The Social, Political and Moral Thought of Adam Ferguson* (Dordrecht, Springer, 2006).

Sheila Mason, "Ferguson and Montesquieu: Tacit Reproaches?," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 11 (1988), 193-203.

Fania Oz-Salzberger, "Scots, Germans, Republic and Commerce", in Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage. Volume II* (Cambridge, CUP, 2002), 197-226.

Richard B. Sher, "From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment on Liberty, Virtue, and Commerce," in *Republicanism, Liberty and Commercial Society 1649-1776*, ed. David Wootton (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994), 368-402.

Richard B. Sher, "Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and the Problem of National Defense," *Journal of Modern History* 61 (1989), 240-68.

(c) 2007-08 Cambridge Political Thought Seminars.